

# Re-forging the Iron Division: The Reconstitution of the 28th Infantry Division between the Hürtgen and the Ardennes

A Monograph  
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## **Abstract**

Re-forging the Iron Division: The Reconstitution of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division between the Hürtgen and the Ardennes, by MAJ Adam R. Grove, 62 pages.

The 28th Infantry Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard suffered near collapse in the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest in November 1944 but recovered in time to delay a German force eight times its size in the Battle of the Bulge just four weeks later. This analysis looked at how the Division was able to recover by analyzing it as a system set in a larger systemic context. The research showed that the individual replacement system, despite its reputation, ultimately enabled the foundation for the Division's rapid reconstitution by; improving the average replacement soldier's physical and mental quality, their level of individual training, and providing them when requested and in sufficient numbers. Also, due to the unique nature of the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest and the Division's resilient structure, headquarters elements at battalion and above, supporting units, and core groups of veterans in the infantry companies provided continuity that enabled reconstitution. In addition, during the four-week recovery period, leaders at all levels rebuilt teamwork by strengthening the effectiveness of leadership, conducting progressive training, and working holistically to raise soldier morale. More broadly, the Iron Division's example shows that many of the conditions for success or failure in a future war may already be set. The Army and nation must look holistically at how current systems tie back to the broader national moral and physical capabilities. Quality, training, and morale of soldiers will always be critical to maintaining the cohesion and thus effectiveness of units engaged in combat, and when they falter, it requires a holistic effort, with sufficient time and space to fix it.

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## Acronyms

AGF	Army Ground Forces
Inf. Div.	Infantry Division
Inf. Reg.	Infantry Regiment
USO	United Services Organizations

## Introduction

On November 14, 1944, Cy Peterman of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* watched survivors of the 28th Infantry Division (Inf. Div.) emerge from their struggle with German forces in the Hürtgen Forest:

They crouched in their vehicles, staring straight ahead. If there were heroics to recount, someone else had to talk. The men of this unit (28th Inf.) would not. Too many of their companions remained behind, too many were dead or missing. Too many grievously wounded and shattered in nerves and spirit. If they never saw the Hürtgen Forest again it would suit them. . . . They had enough.<sup>1</sup>

The Division's three infantry regiments left the Hürtgen smashed, demoralized, and combat ineffective. In two weeks of deadly combat, it suffered over five thousand casualties, more than 93 percent of them infantry soldiers. Their ill-fated attack resulted in what the official US Army history called "one of the most costly division actions in the whole of World War II."<sup>2</sup> The First Army commander subsequently ordered the Division to a quiet sector along the German-Luxembourg border where it rested, resupplied, and trained. Just four weeks later, on December 16, 1944, Hitler initiated the last great German offensive of the war in the Ardennes. The 28th Inf. Div. was in the way. Through the first three days and nights of this campaign, the Division confronted the leading edge of the Fifth German Panzer Army, eight times its size, and knocked it off its time line. Historians and military experts have praised the solid performance of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Peterman, "Great Unsung Battle of the 28th Division: Pennsylvanians on the Western Front," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 1944, Robert H. Henschen Collection, Series #272.99, Manuscript Group 272, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>2</sup> Edward J. Drea, *Unit Reconstitution - A Historical Perspective* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, December 1983), Appendix A, 34; Charles B. MacDonald, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, The Siegfried Line Campaign* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1993), 373.



Division in blocking the German assault. A few observers note that the recovery of the 28th Inf. Div. during the month between these two battles contributed significantly to this success.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1941, with war raging in Europe, the US Army mobilized the 28th Inf. Div. of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Over the next three years, the Army refined the Division into an eclectic mix of regular, reserve, and conscript soldiers and leaders for combat in the European Theater of Operations.<sup>4</sup> The Division landed on Omaha Beach on July 22, 1944, just six weeks after the invasion of Normandy, and joined XIX Corps, commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett. The Corps was part of Lieutenant General Courtney Hodge's First Army. Arriving at the beginning of Operation Cobra, the breakout from the hedgerows, it moved into combat near Saint-Lô, to assist in the Allied effort to trap a large German force in the Mortain Pocket.<sup>5</sup> Major General Lloyd D. Brown initially commanded the Division, but Lieutenant General Omar Bradley relieved him on August 12 1944, due to his poor leadership of the Division at the Battle of Gathemo. Just a few hours later, a German sniper killed his replacement, Brigadier General James E. Wharton. On August 14, Major General Norman "Dutch" Cota assumed command. Cota, a United States Military Academy graduate and a highly respected officer, was acclaimed for his critical leadership, as assistant division commander of the 29th Inf.

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh M. Cole, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1965), 211; John C. McManus, *Alamo in the Ardennes: The Untold Story of the American Soldiers Who Made the Defense of Bastogne Possible* (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley, 2007), 254; Drea, 51; MAJ Jeffrey P. Holt, USA, "Operational Performance of the U.S. 28th Infantry Division September to December 1944" (Master's Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1994), 51.

<sup>4</sup> Uzal W. Ent and Robert Grant Crist, eds., *The First Century: A History of the 28th Infantry Division* (Harrisburg, PA: The Division, 1979), 15; Michael E. Weaver, *Guard Wars: The 28th Infantry Division in World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1960), 187, 303.

Div., during the beach landings at Omaha on D-Day. The 28th Inf. Div. then joined in the First Army breakout and pursuit across France. On August 28, Hodges transferred the Division to V Corps, and the following day, its soldiers marched under the *Arc de Triomphe* in the Paris liberation parade on its way to the nearby front. The Division continued to pursue the fleeing Germans through Luxembourg and Belgium until early September. Most division soldiers felt the war would be over by Christmas. However, by mid-September, the Allied offensive outran its supplies and stalled on the formidable line of defense along the German border called the Western Wall. Here the Germans stiffened, with their backs against their homeland, in more favorable terrain, marking the beginning of the Siegfried Line Campaign. After a few weeks of reconnaissance in force by the Division near Uettfeld Germany, V Corps reduced operations for the remainder of October, giving the Division needed time to train and incorporate replacements.<sup>6</sup>

On October 26, 1944, the Division assumed a sector previously occupied by the U.S. 9th Inf. Div. near the towns of Germeter and Vossenack just west of the Hürtgen Forest. First Army, under General Dwight D. Eisenhower's return to a broad front strategy following Operation Market Garden, crossed the Rhine south of Cologne. The V Corps was to clear the right flank of the VII Corps, the main effort, in preparation for its attack to seize Aachen and the Roer River Dams. Lieutenant General Leonard T. Gerow, commander of the V Corps, chose the newly assigned 28th Inf. Div. to attack into the thick dark forest, to seize key terrain in the vicinity of the town of Schmidt. Factors stacked against the Division's attack before it even began. Intelligence about the enemy was wrong, claiming they only lightly held the area. German units in fact were conducting a relief in place, doubling their number, while high-level German leaders

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<sup>6</sup> Weaver, 172, 185; Blumenson, 297; Thomas G. Bradbeer, *Major General Cota and the Battle of the Huertgen Forest: A Failure of Battle Command?* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 1; Blumenson, 622; Charles Brown MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 5; Ent and Crist, 161.

conducted a war game nearby on the very scenario that was about to unfold. Weather conditions were the worst recorded in years, reducing roads to quagmires of mud and limiting aerial support. Bitter cold made conditions unbearable. Gerow forced a scripted plan on the Division, sending the Division's three regiments in three directions after independent objectives. Further, with only limited reconnaissance, the Division designated a steep, nine-foot wide, twisting forest road, the Kall Trail, as the Division's main supply route. These factors, among others, eventually led to a tragedy of catastrophic proportions for the soldiers of the Division in the Hürtgen, resulting in a nearly complete annihilation of its infantry formations.

On November 2, 1944 at 0900, the infantry regiments of the Division advanced in three different directions: the 109th Infantry Regiment (Inf. Reg.) advanced north towards the town of Hürtgen; the 112th Regiment attacked east towards the towns of Vossenack and Schmidt; and the 110th moved south to the town of Simonskall (Refer to Appendix A). Over the next two weeks, the regiments either failed to secure or later lost their original objectives in the Hürtgen, as the strong German forces defending the area badly mauled them. Between November 2 and November 13, 1944, the Division suffered 5,028 total losses almost entirely from the roughly six thousand infantry billets within the Division. Miraculously, the Army maintained the Division at nearly full strength during the fight by furiously pushing replacements to the front. However, leaders within the Division eventually determined the subordinate regiments were combat-ineffective, as inexperienced replacements predominantly came to fill the ranks, and the nucleus of experienced veterans broke down. On November 13, Hodges approved Cota's request to remove the entire Division from the fight.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 88; MacDonald, *Siegfried Line Campaign*, 325-326; Cecil B. Currey, *Follow Me and Die: The Destruction of an American Division in World War II* (New York: Military Heritage, 1988), 21; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 102; Currey, 22; Bradbeer, 34; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 119.

On November 14, Hodges assigned the 28<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. to Lieutenant General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps, who moved it to a quiet sector along the German-Luxembourg border. One month later, on December 16, as the Division guarded a twenty-five mile front in the Ardennes Forest, Hitler unleashed his last great offensive, determined to split the allied lines, seize Antwerp, and negotiate a settlement to the war. Facing the Fifth German Panzer Army, the Iron Division fought for survival in tactical battles with strategic implications. General Hasso von Manteuffel, believing he faced a tired, degraded, and overstretched American unit, focused beyond the Division's positions opposite the Our and Clerf River crossings, onto the critical road juncture in Bastogne, nineteen miles away. However, the Pennsylvania unit fought a well-disciplined delaying action over a four-day period, begrudgingly yielding ground and knocking the Fifth Panzer Army off its timeline, thereby allowing the paratroopers of the 101st Inf. Div. to enter Bastogne ahead of the Germans (Refer to Appendix B).

In the center, the 110th Inf. Reg. occupied a stretch of nine miles on the western ridge overlooking the Our River and received the brunt of the assault of the entire XLVII Panzer Corps, with three reconstituted divisions. The companies of the Regiment stubbornly held on to strong points until forced to fall back, knocking the Germans off their timeline. In the north, the 112th Inf. Reg. absorbed an onslaught by the two divisions of the LVIII Panzer Corps along their six-mile front, mostly east of the Our River. The Regiment forced the entire LVIII Corps south of the Regiment's sector, where they crossed and severed the Regiment from the Division. Organizationally intact, the Regiment linked up with the 106th Division to the north on December 19, and helped to defend St. Vith. In the south, the 109th Inf. Reg. held onto strong points for two days along their nine-mile front from Ettelbruck to the town of Fuhren, against attacks by two German divisions of the LXXXV Corps. Low on ammunition and fuel, the Regiment slowly fell back, consolidating along a line near Diekirch where it inflicted significant destruction on the

German forces. Ultimately, the Division's regiments fought a skillful, determined, delaying action against overwhelming odds just four weeks after near annihilation in the Hürtgen Forest.<sup>8</sup>

Historians have written extensively on campaigns like these as part of the US Army's operations in the Northwest European Theater of Operations. In the immediate decades following the war, the US Army prepared its official European Theater history sub-series entitled *United States Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*. Charles MacDonald authored the volume of that series that covers the Hürtgen, entitled *The Siegfried Line Campaign*. Hugh Cole wrote the volume covering the Battle of the Bulge, called *Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*.<sup>9</sup> In terms of unofficial histories of the overall Northwest European Theater, Russell Weigley authored one of the better ones in his book *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign in France and Germany, 1944-1945*, released in 1981. Rick Atkinson, added more recently with the widely acclaimed work *The Guns at Last Light: the War in Western Europe 1944-1945* (The Liberation Trilogy Book 3), released in 2013.<sup>10</sup> For the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, Edward G. Miller wrote an unofficial, but well researched, recounting of the Hürtgen Battle called *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, published in 1995. Charles MacDonald also released an unofficial history called *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest* in 2003.<sup>11</sup> John Eisenhower, the son of the Supreme Allied Commander in the war, wrote one of the better unofficial histories of the Battle of the Bulge

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<sup>8</sup> Weaver, 212, 240; Jack Colbaugh, *The Bloody Patch, A True Story of the Daring 28th Infantry Division* (New York: Vantage Press, 1973), xiii MacDonald, *Siegfried Line Campaign*, 174-176; 193, 223; Omar Nelson Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 475.

<sup>9</sup> McDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*; Cole.

<sup>10</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981); Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (Volume Three of The Liberation Trilogy) (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Edward G. Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground: The Hürtgen Forest and the Roer River Dams, 1944-1945* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995); MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*.

entitled *The Bitter Woods*, published in 1969. Charles MacDonald also wrote a good account of the battle in *A Time for Trumpets*, published in 1984. In 1994, Trevor Dupuy added a comprehensive volume on the battle entitled *Hitler's Last Gamble: The Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945*.<sup>12</sup>

A detailed analysis of the US Army's replacement system figures heavily in the thesis of this monograph. In 1954, Lieutenant Colonel Leonard Lewill published the first historically comprehensive study entitled *The Personnel Replacement System in the United States Army*. The Center for Military History consolidated several Army Ground Forces (AGF) post-Second World War studies into a 696-page, ten study volume called *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* by Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast in 1991. The postwar General Board of the European Theater of Operations also published a 197-page report "Reinforcement System and Reinforcement Procedures in European Theater of Operations." These reports all concluded generally that the US Army's personnel replacement system in the Second World War suffered from weaknesses, but cite many Army attempts to resolve these issues.<sup>13</sup> Plenty of unofficial histories support these conclusions, chief among them Weigley's *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*. Conversely, some unofficial sources challenge these assertions. Peter Mansoor argues the Army successfully mitigated the weaknesses of the replacement system in

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<sup>12</sup> John S. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods: The Dramatic Story, Told at All Echelons, from Supreme Command to Squad Leader, of the Crisis That Shook the Western Coalition: Hitler's Surprise Ardennes Offensive* (New York: Putnam, 1969); Charles Brown MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Morrow, 1984); Trevor N. Dupuy, *Hitler's Last Gamble: The Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Leonard L. Lerwill, *The Personnel Replacement System of the United States Army* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1954); Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1991); The General Board, US Forces European Theater, *Reinforcement System and Reinforcement Procedures in the European Theater of Operations* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), accessed December 15, 2014, <http://carl.army.mil/eto/eto-003.pdf>.

*The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945*, published in 1999. Robert Rush, in his 2001 book *Hell in Hürtgen Forest*, further argues that the replacement system actually lowered casualties and improved US operational performance. In *Unit Reconstitution, A Historical Perspective*, Edward J. Drea provides a detailed exposition on the Second World War equipment and personnel replacement processes and how they worked for the 28th Inf. Div. in the Hürtgen.<sup>14</sup>

Several works on the 28th Inf. Div.'s actions in the fall of 1944 served as resources for this analysis. Michael Weaver's well-researched and exhaustive analysis *Guard Wars* covers the Division's preparations for and participation in the Northwest European Theater Campaign of 1944 and 1945. Jeffrey P. Holt's thesis entitled "Operational Performance of the U.S. 28th Inf. Div. September to December 1944" analyzes the operational performance of the 28th Inf. Div. in the fall of 1944. Harry Kemp wrote a valuable history of the 109th Inf. Reg. from an insider's perspective in *The Regiment*. William M. Pena's memoir of his twenty-four weeks as a lieutenant in the Division, entitled *As Far As Schleiden*, provides valuable insight at the company level. Clarence Blakeslee provides the perspective of a replacement soldier in his book *A Personal Account of WWII by Draftee #36887149*.<sup>15</sup> Most of these sources skip the four weeks between the two battles. To fill this gap, primary reports, unit histories, correspondence, and books by soldiers who were there provide the bulk of the source material.

While all of these sources cover the fighting exploits of the Division during these two well-known battles, none addresses in any detail the process of recovery that the unit undertook in

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<sup>14</sup> Weigley, 370-373; Robert S. Rush, *Hell in Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 302, 304; Drea.

<sup>15</sup> Weaver; Holt; Harry M. Kemp, *The Regiment: Let the Citizens Bear Arms!* (Austin, Texas: Nortex Press, 1990); William M. Pena, *As Far As Schleiden: A Memoir of World War II* (Houston, TX: The Author, 1992); Clarence Blakeslee, *A Personal Account of WWII by Draftee #36887149* (Rockford, MI: Rockford Squire, 1998).

the four week interim. In over two weeks of bitter fighting from November 2 to November 18, 1944, the Iron Division broke against strong German forces in the inhospitable conditions of the Hürtgen Forest. Yet, four weeks later, the Division was able to fight a deliberate and effective delaying action against overwhelming German forces in the Ardennes. How was the 28th Inf. Div. able to transform from a broken unit into one that gave a good account under severe pressure just one month later? Some might argue that the Division actually did not make a good showing, but the preponderance of analysis by historians and leaders suggests otherwise.<sup>16</sup> Others may claim that the Germans were already beaten, yet the Division faced some of the best-equipped and trained troops the Germans could muster at this point in the war. Yet others may believe that the Division's rebuilding efforts did not materially contribute to the stubborn defense in the Ardennes. Drea addresses this when he argues, "It speaks to the success of the reconstitution measures that the Division, shattered and combat ineffective a month earlier, fought a determined defensive action despite being outnumbered, outgunned, and surprised by the German thrust."<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, the 28th Inf. Div. was ready because of the Army's solid replacement system, the Division's resilient structure, and holistic team building efforts during those four weeks.

### **A Strong Replacement System**

Historically, the policy of the Regular Army of the United States specified replacing soldiers and equipment in units at the front, instead of rotating in new formations. Ulysses Grant once wrote to Lincoln, "One drafted man in an old regiment is worth three in a new one."<sup>18</sup> Not until the First World War, in response to the stalemate and high attrition of trench warfare, did a

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<sup>16</sup> Cole, 211, 224, 603; Eisenhower, 463.

<sup>17</sup> Drea, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Lewill, 93.



concept emerge of systematically rotating units out of combat, while simultaneously filling soldier and equipment shortages. The American Expeditionary Force rotated whole divisions off the line for rest, recovery, and resupply in areas established by the commanding general of the Services of Supply. However, the commander's staff lost focus on this system with the rapid advances during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign from October to November 1918. They sought to maintain pressure on the German defense by stripping troops from newly arriving divisions to round out experienced ones fighting at the front. The Army's lesson from the First World War was that it was good to maintain experienced units at full strength on the front at the expense of new and partially trained divisions. This conclusion contributed to the development of an individual replacement system in the Second World War. In addition, facing national manpower shortages in 1943, the War Department agreed to limit the Army to ninety divisions, creating the need for a huge replacement pool of soldiers and a way to move them to the front. This system would maintain the limited number of frontline divisions at full strength, while they remained in nearly constant contact with the enemy. It appeared no one was overly concerned with the effective functioning of these units under the stress of continuous battle. Instead, the Army stuck with the First World War model for rest and recovery by establishing a rear area with a separate commander, where supplies, replacements, and recovering units were to converge.<sup>19</sup>

In mid-1943, the Army shifted from preparing whole units to training and moving large numbers of high quality, well-trained individual replacements, primarily to the infantry. A typical infantry replacement heading to the Northwest European Theater first traveled to a stateside post where he joined a replacement company for seventeen weeks of basic training. Afterwards, he

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<sup>19</sup> Drea, 7, 9; Lewill, 207, 216; Maurice Matloff, *Command Decisions: The 90-Division Gamble* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1990) 366-367, accessed December 28, 2014, [http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7\\_15.htm](http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_15.htm); War Department, Field Manual (FM) 100-10, *Field Services Regulations Administration* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 28.

would receive a ten to twelve day pass and then report to the replacement depot at the embarkation port, from whence the Army would usually ship him directly to France. Within one to three days of landing, he would board a boxcar train that would either take him to a replacement depot for additional training or, in times of high demand, straight to the forward depots and combat divisions. Simultaneously, the Army developed parallel processes for resupplying and fixing equipment in the communications zone under the command of the theater commander. The equipment recovery and resupply process was generally very good during slow rates of advance but broke down during high rates.<sup>20</sup> However, equipment resupply plays only a minor role in the story of the 28th Inf. Div. between the Hürtgen and Ardennes, as addressed later.

After leaving the Hürtgen, the 28th Inf. Div. was broken and needed repair. Simply replacing lost personnel and equipment did not accomplish this. At the time, the Army had no formal name for what the unit required, but today the military calls it unit reconstitution.<sup>21</sup> In this document, the term reconstitution refers to a process undertaken by commanders and staff of degraded units to assess its level of deterioration; attempt to fix it by reorganizing internally; and when unable, moving to a quiet location to undertake regeneration of lost force structure (soldiers and equipment), preferably with outside help. For the 28th Inf. Div., the success of its

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<sup>20</sup> Drea, 19-21; Alan L. Gropman, *The Big 'L': American Logistics in World War II* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), 341-342. As the United States Army entered the Second World War, its bureaucratic organization was outdated and inefficient. President Roosevelt divided the overhead of the Army in early 1942 into three autonomous but interrelated components reporting to the Chief of Staff (Marshall). The Army Air Forces and Army Ground Forces had similar missions to provide forces (air or ground) that were organized, trained, and equipped effectively for combat operations. The Army Service Forces, designated as such from the Services of Supply, assumed the broad mission to provide services and supplies to meet military requirements. Roles between the three organizations conflicted regularly throughout the war, including responsibility for training and movement of replacements.

<sup>21</sup> Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-9, *Reconstitution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1992).

reconstitution depended greatly on the foundation provided by the quality of the Army's replacement system.

Some historians claim that the Army's personnel replacement system, rather than empowering reconstitution, actually contributed to the destruction of US Army units like the Iron Division in the Hürtgen. Historian Martin van Creveld claims that the individual replacement system was probably the biggest contributing factor to the challenges the US Army faced in the Second World War. Many historians support his belief that the individual replacement system crushed the morale and *esprit de corps* of front-line units, and did not effectively provide enough replacements of a sufficient quality to the field forces when needed. They often cite the US Army's experience in the Hürtgen Forest as an example of the failure of this system. More recently, other historians have started to question this narrative, particularly the claims of poor quality and training. Rush in *Hell in Hürtgen Forest*, argues that the replacement system, despite not taking care of the psychological and social needs of the individual soldier, probably ended the war sooner and reduced overall US casualties.<sup>22</sup> The question is, did the individual replacement system, as it emerged within the mandatory strategic framework, lay the foundation for the 28th Inf. Div.'s successful reconstitution in November and December of 1944, as it prepared, unknowingly, for the German Ardennes Offensive.

Despite its well-documented shortfalls, which caused great issues with soldiers' morale, the Army's replacement system, as it stood in late 1944, did lay the groundwork for the 28th Inf. Div. to reconstitute quickly and effectively after near annihilation in the Hürtgen Forest. Improving replacements' morale was part of a bigger issue that ultimately required more than the Army's efforts, which the final section will address. Operating within strategic manpower

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *Fighting Power* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 78-79; Geoffrey Perret, *There's A War To Be Won* (New York: Random House, 1991), 375; Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 140; Rush, 304-305.

constraints, the Army gathered lessons learned and worked to improve its replacement system. Ultimately, it set the initial foundation for the Division's rapid reconstitution by improving the average replacement soldier's physical and mental quality, and their level of individual training, while ensuring they arrived when requested and in sufficient numbers.

The Army recognized early that the quality of enlisted infantry soldiers was central to the conduct of the war but struggled to improve it. These soldiers required high mental faculties, physical stamina, and leadership abilities. They held the most mentally and physically challenging jobs, and provided the largest source of officers through Officer Candidate School as the war progressed. However, multiple factors initially limited the ground forces ability to secure high quality enlisted infantrymen. Through 1942 and most of 1943, a series of personnel policies systematically lowered the physical and mental quality of new enlisted infantry soldiers in the Army, relative to the other services and branches of the US Military. The navy and marine corps snatched up more high-intelligence candidates. The Army sent a higher percentage of its most intelligent enlisted soldiers to the Air and Service Forces by assigning soldiers based on civilian experience, while liberal policies released volunteers to the Air Forces.<sup>23</sup>

The deficiencies of the infantry's lower enlisted quality did not gain the attention of senior leaders until late 1943, when US Army units began entering combat wholesale. A sample of twelve thousand combat soldiers studied late in 1943, proved to be below the Army average in height, weight, and intelligence. Commanders blamed the low quality of the infantry for decreased unit effectiveness in combat in the North African and Mediterranean theaters, where the Army had begun operations in November 1942. When the leadership of the Army realized the problem, they moved quickly and deliberately to improve the overall quality of the enlisted

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<sup>23</sup> Robert R. Palmer, Army Ground Forces Study No. 10, *Principles and Methods of Training in Army Ground Forces* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), 43; Robert R. Palmer, Army Ground Forces Study No. 5, *Procurement of Enlisted Personnel for the AGF: The Problem of Quality* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), 1-2.

infantrymen throughout 1944, just when front-line units like the 28th Inf. Div. needed replacements the most. In early August 1943, at General Lesley J. McNair's urging, the Army initiated a public affairs campaign on behalf of the infantry to raise public support and draw better candidates. The Army evened the intelligence standards across the Army branches. Perhaps most significantly, the Army instituted a physical profile system and assigned 80 percent of the top physical category to the infantry. In 1944, the Army sent the AGF over one hundred thousand men considered to be of the highest quality from other elements of the Army. The Advanced Study Training Program and the Replacement Training Centers, two of the better sources, accounted for nearly 90 percent of all enlisted replacements in 1944.<sup>24</sup>

On the officer side, the Army Inspector General lambasted the poor quality of officer candidates in late 1942 and recommended sweeping changes to the programs. In 1943, when the War Department reduced the number of divisions, the Army switched focus from securing a high quantity of officers to those of higher quality. The reduction in divisions caused the Army to be significantly over-strength junior officers, which gave the Army greater latitude to eliminate the least mentally and physically fit and to build up a reserve of quality officers. This pool of over-strength officers served as the source of 28th Inf. Div. officer replacements in the late fall of 1944.<sup>25</sup> Finally, since officer candidate school became the largest source of infantry officers, the improvement in enlisted quality ultimately also lifted the quality of infantry officers. As soon as the Army recognized the problem of quality within the enlisted and officer ranks of the infantry, it moved swiftly and decisively to rectify the issue.

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<sup>24</sup> Palmer, *Procurement of Enlisted Personnel for the AGF*, 13, 24, 28, 30, 40; Palmer, *Principles and Methods of Training in Army Ground Forces*, 43; William R. Keast, Army Ground Forces Study No. 7, *Provision of Enlisted Replacement* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), 7; William R. Keast, Army Ground Forces Study No. 6, *The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), 27.

<sup>25</sup> Keast, *The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers*, 10, 18.

Beyond their basic quality, the Army also improved the training of infantry replacements as the war progressed. The AGF transitioned from unit to replacement focused training in 1943, and its initial lack of emphasis on replacements showed. Commanders from the field in North Africa and the Mediterranean complained not just about the quality, but also the training of the infantry replacements they received. General George C. Marshall, relying on well-trained soldiers as the cornerstone of the Army's individual replacement system, charged McNair and the AGF with explanation and remediation. Beginning in the summer of 1943 through the end of the war, all levels of the Army cooperated to improve the infantry soldier's training based on continuous feedback from the field. In response to the first lessons learned in combat operations, the AGF issued updated training guidance on June 7, 1943. In August, the AGF increased initial entry training from thirteen to seventeen weeks, including two weeks of field time. In the summer of 1944, new training programs in the Replacement and School Command used more live ammunition, and increased focus on weapons and tactical training of buddy-teams, squads, and platoons. After initial reports of poor readiness levels of equipment, the Army expanded maintenance training. General Benjamin Lear, who replaced McNair in July of 1943 as head of Army Ground Forces, doubled his staff and inspections of training installations. The field commanders also complained of receiving unprepared officers who had spent inadequate time with troops in the United States. The AGF lengthened officer candidate school to four months, required officer replacements to serve at least three months with tactical units in the United States, focused on combined arms of infantry with artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers, and increased live fires. By mid-1943, the Army began dismissing more officers in the AGF due to unsatisfactory performance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bell I. Wiley, Army Ground Forces Study No. 11, *Training in the Ground Army 1942-1945* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1948), 49, 51, 57, 73, 75; Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacements*, 7; Keast, *The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers*, 18-20, 80.

Units on the front often complained that replacements languished for weeks in forward replacement depots without organized training while their trained proficiency slipped, but in reality, the time spent at the depot depended on the situation of the ground. An account from a 4th Inf. Div. soldier recalls three weeks spent between his two-man tent and the chow hall. Private Eddie Slovik, an infamous 28th Inf. Div. soldier, the first and last soldier executed for desertion since the Civil War, spent less than two days at the forward depot. He traveled from New York City to the front in less than three weeks, where he joined G Company of the 109th Inf. Reg. on August 25, 1944.<sup>27</sup> In response to these complaints, the AGF, established its own European replacement system in April of 1944, and began to focus on training. The commander, Colonel Walter Layman, gathered feedback from the field and held his team accountable to respond. In a September 1944 memorandum he stated, “our training program is sound” but stressed making improvements immediately based on the feedback from the field in order to “send forward the best trained and physically conditioned replacement which time and the facilities permit.”<sup>28</sup> The feedback provided by units was one of many ways they contributed to improving and maintaining the training proficiency of infantry replacements. Some divisions developed relationships with their replacement battalions and provided training cadres. Others, when possible, trained their own replacements near the front. During the earlier fighting in the hedgerows, the 28th Inf. Div.’s infantry regiments trained replacements on the newest techniques for defeating German defenses.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacements*, 7; Herb Fowler, *The Men of the Terrible Green Cross* (Hillsdale, MI: Herb Fowler, 1991), 24; William Bradford Huie, *The Execution of Private Slovik* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2004), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Colonel Walter G. Layman, “Training of Replacements,” Memorandum of Ground Forces Replacement System, September 10, 1944, United States Army, European Theater Historical Division Records, 1941-1946, Record Group 498, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>29</sup> Holt, 95; Weaver, 171.

Quantitatively, by the fall of 1944, the system displayed a satisfactory ability to meet the Division's demand for specific numbers of replacements of a requisite skill set in a timely manner. Army-wide, the system experienced only one significant shortage of infantry replacements peaking in mid-December 1944 when the 12th Army Group fell short about thirteen thousand infantrymen. This issue never greatly affected the 28th Inf. Div. since most of their replacements came from the last remnants of a reserve pool established after D-Day. Regarding the timeliness of delivery, the AGF changed its policy in late October 1944, because of complaints from the field, to allow units to requisition against anticipated casualties forty-eight hours in advance. A corps commander wrote shortly after its implementation that the new cycle worked in getting soldiers to the unit the day after losses. The Iron Division began its operation in the Hürtgen Forest under this system with an available strength of 13,932 soldiers and ended the major phases of the operation on November 13 with an available strength of 13,447 despite over 5,028 total losses. During the battle from November 2 to 18, 1944, it requisitioned 4,458 infantry replacements and received them in a relatively evenly dispersed manner.<sup>30</sup> The system had effectively pushed forward to the 28th Inf. Div. the requisite number of troops, of the right type, when requested.

The cumulative efforts to improve the quality and training of infantry replacements, and provide them effectively to front-line units, had a profound effect on the 28th Inf. Div.'s reconstitution. One post-war Army study stated that because of high turnover, "Quality of replacements might therefore rapidly affect quality of the Army at the decisive spot—namely, the front-lines."<sup>31</sup> The evidence suggests that the quality of the individual replacement soldier was generally good by late 1944. Commanders were "generally satisfied" with replacements that had

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<sup>30</sup> The General Board, US Forces European Theater, Appendix A, Appendix 3, Appendix 18; Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacements*, 26-29; Drea, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Keast, *The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers*, 33.



completed seventeen weeks of infantry training.<sup>32</sup> One Lieutenant Colonel in the First Inf. Div. said in August 1944, “Our replacements on the whole have been very good.”<sup>33</sup> A regimental commander said of his officers from Officer Candidate School, “They are far in the way the best that I have seen in the Army—well grounded, interested in their job, industrious, ambitious, and on the ball twenty-four hours a day.”<sup>34</sup> The Army’s own critical post war analysis found that replacement soldiers excelled in shooting, moving, and communicating, and their physical fitness surpassed front-line troops.<sup>35</sup> One German officer agreed, “The key to the success of all American attacks was, besides the material superiority, the outstanding training of the individual soldier.”<sup>36</sup> One infantry replacement recalled being “confident that I was one of the best of the finest, best equipped soldiers in the world.”<sup>37</sup> Cota’s personal letter to Cy Peterman summarizes best his feelings about the quality of the soldiers the 28th Inf. Div. received through the individual replacement system. “I personally think that the Replacement System did a fine job training the individual soldier. Individually, on the whole, the replacements I thought were well trained.”<sup>38</sup> Despite complaints about the efficacy of the replacement system, and the damage to soldier morale, by late 1944, the Army provided the most well trained, intelligent, and physically fit replacements, as efficiently as possible. Therefore, the 28th Inf. Div. was able to rely on a solid

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<sup>32</sup> Palmer, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Layman, Memorandum, “Training of Replacements.”

<sup>34</sup> Keast, *The Procurement and Branch Distribution of Officers*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> The General Board, *US Forces European Theater*, 32; Wiley, 56.

<sup>36</sup> 212th Volksgrenadier Division Report of Operations Ardennes Campaign, National Archives II Record Group 242, Captured German Records, Records of German Field Commands, Divisions, 212th Infantry Division, January 1945, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Fowler, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Norman Cota to Ivan Peterman, June 21, 1946, Norman D. Cota Papers, Box 2, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

foundation of high-quality replacement soldiers as it began its reconstitution. However, this fact alone did not ensure the success of the Division's reconstitution efforts.

### **Resilient Division Structure**

On November 12, 1944, while defending the Division's front just east of Vossenack, 1st Battalion of the 110th Inf. Reg. nearly disintegrated as a fighting unit. Under heavy indirect fire, it threw a hastily organized company of replacements into the gap and barely repulsed a German counterattack. "Very much disorganized," and holding the position with only "small disorganized groups," 1st Battalion was "in a bad way as to strength, physical condition of the men, and morale."<sup>39</sup> The regimental commander assessed the situation and ordered the remnants of the battalion rearward to "more tactical ground." Other infantry battalions within the Division experienced similar degrees of collapse in the Hürtgen. Describing the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 112th Inf. Reg., one historian noted, "In all the annals of American history, widespread routs such as occurred at Schmidt on November 4 and Vossenack on November 6 have been extremely rare."<sup>40</sup>

Academics study collapses like those of the infantry battalions of the Iron Division because they are part of a larger discussion regarding victory and defeat in war. Maintaining or losing unit integrity at decisive points can decide victory at the tactical, operational, or even strategic levels. Studies have revealed that units that are more cohesive display greater effectiveness and resiliency against collapse.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, during reconstitution, units need to

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<sup>39</sup> 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, November 30, 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1320, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>40</sup> Curry, 168.

<sup>41</sup> Jomini, Antoine Henri, baron de, 1779-1869, *The Art of War* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1862), 71; Frans P. B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War the Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 125; MAJ Michael W. Alexander, USA, "Cohesive Tactical Units Are

restore cohesion where it has been lost. However, academics have offered various understandings of cohesion. S. L. A. Marshall, writing after the Second World War, described it as a form of “spiritual unity” soldiers reached with their comrades that enabled moving and fighting.<sup>42</sup> Anthony Kellett argued, “Cohesion denotes the feelings of belonging and solidarity that occur mostly at the primary group level.”<sup>43</sup> Most sources provide simplistic models of unit cohesion, focusing on the lowest levels.<sup>44</sup> This begs the question of how the Iron Division endured the collapse of so many company and battalion-sized units in the Hürtgen yet rapidly reconstituted in the following four weeks.

Nora Kinzer, in her study of the 1982 Falkland Islands War called *Mates and Muchachos*, authored a systemic theory of unit cohesion that provides a framework to answer this question. She discussed four types: horizontal cohesion among peer groups; vertical cohesion between leaders and their subordinates; organizational cohesion within an army; and societal cohesion between an army and its society. Using this framework facilitates the analysis of the cohesion of the 28th Inf. Div. through general systems theory lens, as a system comprised of subsystems. Specialization (i.e. infantry, artillery, and headquarters) and hierarchy (i.e. company, battalion, and regiment) characterized the Division. Integration and coordination across these roles and levels added strength and resiliency to its structure, in multiple directions, giving it an emergent

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Effective Units” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1995), 1.

<sup>42</sup> S. L. A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1982), 46.

<sup>44</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates and Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1991), vii.

quality stronger than its parts.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while many of the lower level infantry formations lost cohesiveness, from squad to battalion, the larger division system remained intact and proficient, facilitating rapid reconstitution following the Hürtgen. Within the Iron Division, experienced headquarters at battalion and above continued to function proficiently, supporting units retained their enabling capabilities, and the companies kept at least some unit structure around core groups of veterans.

The efforts of the headquarters contributed to holistic cohesion. The 1944 Army operations manual states, “The combat value of the infantry division derives from its ability to combine the action of the various arms and services to maintain combat over a considerable period of time.”<sup>46</sup> The division contained three infantry regiments, an artillery brigade, an engineer battalion, and a special troops battalion with multiple separate functional companies. It usually had tank, anti-tank, air defense and other capabilities attached. The commander and staff at each level, as the headquarters element, coordinated and integrated the activities of subordinate, adjacent, and supporting units to achieve the emergent effect of combined arms warfare. The Army expected commanders to lead, inspire, influence, control operations, and supervise. The staff was to relieve the commander of distracting details, keep an estimate of the situation, and provide expert feedback to him on current and future operations. They were also to provide personnel, supply, operational, communications, and planning support. The coordination with superiors, subordinates, and counterparts at higher and lower levels strengthened vertical cohesion. Communication with peers, and adjacent or supporting units strengthened horizontal cohesion. Organizationally, commanders and staffs built programs that strengthened commitment

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<sup>45</sup> Stewart, 27; Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37-39.

<sup>46</sup> War Department, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 297.

to the unit, and maintained discipline and standards. The Division headquarters improved societal cohesion between the unit and the nation through such means as recorded messages for the home front, and exciting firsthand accounts of battles in regional newspapers. In one article about the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, Peterman named nine Pennsylvania soldiers and their hometowns.<sup>47</sup>

The 28th Inf. Div. retained all of these critical capabilities from battalion to division level in the Hürtgen because its headquarters elements generally did not experience the same erosion of the front-line units. Losses tended to decrease, the further the echelon was from the front. Typical of the Division's infantry companies, Company A of the 110th Inf. Reg. reported strength of 184 soldiers on November 1, declining to a low of ninety on November 12, and slowly rebounding again thereafter. During that same period, the headquarters company of the regiment, comprised of headquarters, intelligence, and signal troops, experienced a reduction in strength of only thirty soldiers before rebounding. The smaller headquarters elements, consisting just of the commander and staff, endured even a lower proportion of casualties. The battalion headquarters did not suffer quite as badly as the companies did. The majority of battalion headquarters (around four officers) survived intact, with some exceptions, like the 1st Battalion, 109th Inf. Reg., which lost its entire headquarters. Of the nine infantry battalion commanders, five remained in command through the battle. The regimental headquarters took fewer casualties, with the most notable outlier being Lieutenant Colonel Carl Peterson, commanding the 109th Inf. Reg. For example; the 110th Inf. Reg. Headquarters retained strength of eleven officers throughout the entire fight. All five

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<sup>47</sup> Office of the Theater Historian, "Order of Battle of the United States Army, World War II: European Theater of Operations, Divisions, 1945," accessed December 30, 2014, <http://www.history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/28id-eto.htm>; War Department, Field Manual (FM) 7-20, *Infantry Battalion* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 5-6 to 5-7; War Department, Field Manual (FM) 7-40, *Infantry Field Manual: Rifle Regiment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 5-8; 2nd BN 112th Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; Ivan Peterman, "Great Unsung Battle of the 28th Division: Pennsylvanians on the Western Front," 3rd page from the end.

warrant officers assigned to the regiment as assistants to the primary staff officers survived the Hürtgen unscathed. The division headquarters did not report a single injury on their morning reports through the Hürtgen.<sup>48</sup> In general, each headquarters echelon suffered nowhere near the casualties of the infantry companies, platoons, and squads, and the further from the front, the fewer casualties received. Thus, for the most part, headquarters could continue their normal functions of coordination and integration, and lead the restoration of the lower level unit cohesion during reconstitution.

Furthermore, these different headquarters elements of the units of the 28th Inf. Div. were cohesive teams, effective teams, with long service together, which further sped recovery. Kemp cites a “well-trained regimental and battalion staff system, which had been exercised since July of 1944,” as a contributing factor for the 109th Inf. Reg.’s success in the Bulge.<sup>49</sup> Many commanders and staffs at battalion and above benefited from years of service together and internal promotion up through the organization. For example, nearly a third of the captains and above listed on a December 1943 roster for the 109th Inf. Reg. had attended the very first federal musters of the 28th Inf. Div. at Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania nearly three years earlier.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> A Company, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November 1944, Box 397, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; HQ Company, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment Unit Morning Reports, November 1944, Boxes 397 and 684, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Kemp, 194; Bradbeer, 39; Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 83; Headquarters, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November 1944, Box 397, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Dorothy Chernitsky, *Voices from the Foxholes* (Connelsville, PA: Connelsville Printing, 1991), 12; Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division, Unit Morning Reports, November 1944, Box 4402, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO.

<sup>49</sup> Kemp, 288.

<sup>50</sup> 109th Infantry Regiment Officer Rosters, February 1941- December 1943. Box 4417. National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; 110th Infantry Regiment Officer Rosters, February 1941- December 1943. Box 397. National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; 112th Infantry Regiment Officer Rosters, February 1941- December 1943. Box 4417. National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Headquarters, 28th Infantry Division Officer Rosters, February 1941-December 1943, Box 4402, National Personnel Records Center, Saint

Some had served much longer, like the commander of the 109th Inf. Reg. in the Hürtgen, Lieutenant Colonel Peterson, who began serving with the unit in 1916. Many long-time Pennsylvania Guardsmen, like Peterson, served in various command and staff positions. Of the remaining division level staff in early 1944, 20 percent served in the Pennsylvania National Guard before the war. One historian notes that prior to the Hürtgen, the chief of staff, two of the three regimental commanders and many of the battalion commanders, had served in the Division for their entire careers. Each of the leaders of the primary staff sections at the division level, to include the chief of staff, had served in their role for nearly a year or longer by the time the reconstitution process began in mid November 1944. Brigadier General Basil Perry, the division artillery commander and a classmate of Cota's at West Point, assumed his position in February 1942 and held it throughout the war. Cota commanded from August 13, 1944 through the war's end.<sup>51</sup> The Division, like other units, generally promoted from within, leavening experience throughout the formation. This familiarity improved informal communication and coordination across the Division, further strengthening both vertical and horizontal cohesion.

A cursory review of the support the headquarters provided to division cohesion in the Hürtgen will highlight some key capabilities that it retained, and therefore did not need to reestablish prior to the Bulge. The Division constantly attempted reorganization to stem the regiments' disintegration. Cota committed the reserve, albeit early, in support of the 112th Inf. Reg. The Division built two task forces to support the regiments across the Kall Trail, Task Force Ripple and Task Force Davis, which both provided significant combat power in failed attempts to

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Louis, MO. December 1943 is the last roster available due to a fire at the National Personnel Center but was just months before the unit entered combat

<sup>51</sup> Company I, 109th Infantry Regiment Officer Rosters, February 1941-December 1943, Box 4417, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Kemp, Appendix B; Curry, 215; Headquarters 28th Infantry Division Officer Rosters, February 1941-December 1943; Bradbeer, 7; Miller, 95; Office of the Theater Historian; Ent, Preface.

rescue the 112th Inf. Reg.'s lost objective in Schmidt. This was valuable experience for Cota and his leadership team that helped in the Ardennes. Commanders coordinated reliefs in place and swapped enabler support. Surgeons negotiated a cease-fire for the transfer of casualties when the Germans severed evacuation routes. The operations section learned valuable lessons about maintaining situational awareness and keeping Cota and higher headquarters informed. Supply worked nonstop to find ways to get food and ammo to the front. In fact, at the height of the fighting, the Division dispatched officers from the supply section to investigate why the units were experiencing supply difficulties.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the headquarters elements retained the ability to serve as the cognitive nerve centers of the different organizations. One meeting highlights this immediate benefit of maintaining staff cohesion at all levels. The Division Logistics Officer (G4) held a meeting November 22, just days after the Division's move to Luxembourg. Multiple supporting elements and all three regimental Executive Officers attended. Topics included getting rid of excess equipment, reinforcing check-in procedures of drivers, returning motors and weapons to fighting condition, and reinitiating ordnance inspections and vehicle spot check teams. This demonstrates how integration and coordination across levels and functions continued generally unabated, which sped the reconstitution process.<sup>53</sup>

Like the higher headquarters, the supporting elements also generally maintained their cohesion and enabling capabilities, further speeding the recovery. Normally, the Division

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<sup>52</sup> MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 99; Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 74, 83, 91; Lloyd C. Johnson, Company C, 103 Medical Battalion, Casualty Evacuation Report, November 1944, Robert Henschen Collection, Series #272.99, Manuscript Group 272, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA; Major Victor Glider, Supply Officer 112th Infantry, Memorandum, "Supply and Evacuation in the Schmidt Operation," November 11, 1944, Manuscript Group 272, Robert Henschen Collection, Series #272.99, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

<sup>53</sup> William P. Simmons, Jr. Division Quartermaster, Notes of Meeting Held in G4 Office, November 22, 1944, US Army Unit Records, 28th Infantry Division, Box 855 S, Subseries IV: Staff section Reports, 1943-1945, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.



achieved greater effectiveness when its enabling units integrated their efforts in support of the infantry. The failure to do so contributed greatly to the Division's struggles in the Hürtgen. The loss of critical comforts and combined arms capabilities for the front-line infantry crushed morale and led to disintegration. At times, medical personnel could not evacuate the wounded. Soldiers went days under constant fire without food. Only limited tanks and tank destroyers could get forward to support the infantry. Weather and terrain rendered air cover ineffective. Even the artillery was unable to get forward to its firing positions.<sup>54</sup> All of these supporting enablers, when properly integrated, would have enhanced the likelihood of success. Still, the supporting units survived the Hürtgen generally intact, learned lessons, and quickly got back to work.

What losses the supporting elements had in men and equipment, the combined efforts of the Division and higher echelons quickly restored. The 707th Tank Battalion, in direct support of the Division's infantry regiments, lost thirty-six of fifty authorized M-4 tanks to destruction or damage in the Hürtgen. Tank replacements and repairs raised the number of operational tanks first to thirty-one by November 12, and then to forty-seven a week later. The Division's artillery units, which proved critical in the Ardennes, survived mostly untouched, except for forward observers. Patton himself underscored the significance of this when he noted that artillery inflicted 47 percent of the total casualties in Europe, as compared to 37 percent by the infantry. The division supply section reported all the infantry regiments fully restocked on sixty-millimeter mortars by December 4. One officer in the Division supply section commented on the miraculous efforts of the Division and higher ordnance support in the repair and replacement of vehicles and

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<sup>54</sup> Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 91; Johnson, Casualty Evacuation Report; Glider, "Supply and Evacuation in the Schmidt Operation"; 112th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, November, 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 98; George Mortimer, Company History of Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment, World War II, November 2, 1944, George Mortimer Collection, Series #272, Manuscript Group 272, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

weapons.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, many of the supporting ties that bound the Division together remained in place after the Hürtgen, able to continue their coordinating and integrating functions.

Despite the structural integrity of the headquarters and supporting elements of the Division, the infantry companies still required regeneration. Many companies experienced dips in effective strength of 50 percent or greater even as they attempted to assimilate new replacements. While many theorists focus on unit cohesion at the infantry squad level, Rush argues that infantry companies in combat remained cohesive as long as there was a small, core group of veterans around which the new soldiers would keep fighting.<sup>56</sup> Within the 28th Inf. Div., these battle-hardened cores facilitated the rapid reconstitution of their infantry companies after the Hürtgen. The experiences of similar companies from other divisions, as well as the story of Company I of the 109th Inf. Reg., demonstrate the existence, characteristics, and importance of these core groups.

Rush, through extensive research of unit morning reports, was able to show that Company A of the 22nd Inf. Reg., which fought in the Hürtgen just a few weeks after the 28<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div., maintained a core of veterans well into the battle. As replacements gained experience, they replaced those veterans from the core that fell out, in a continuous symbiotic process. Rush

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<sup>55</sup> 707th Tank Battalion, After Action Report, Medium Tank Status Tabulation, November 1944, World War 2 Operational Documents, Combined Arms Research Library, 153, accessed December 20, 2014, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p4013coll8>; Minutes, The General Board, US Forces European Theater, Study No. 15, "Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of the Infantry Division (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1946), 2; 28 ID G4 Journal, November-December 1944, Entry 427, Record Group 407, National Archives, College Park, MD; Robert M. Henschen, Personal Account of the Battle of the Bulge, Robert H. Henschen Papers, Individual Collection, Series #272.99, Manuscript Group 272, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, 3rd page from the end.

<sup>56</sup> A Company, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November 1944; Kemp, 228; Pena, 69; Rush, 291, 308.

argues that Company A's personnel turnover typifies that of other US infantry companies in similar battles, like those of the 28th, fighting over the same terrain just a few weeks earlier.<sup>57</sup>

William Pena's memoir, of his time in Company I of the 109th Inf. Reg. from September 1944 to February 1945, adds narrative depth to Rush's assertion. On September 19, 1944, Pena joined Company I on the Siegfried Line as the heavy weapons platoon leader. In his daily memoir over the next twenty-four weeks, he paints an insightful picture of how one such veteran core emerged within his battered company. His firsthand account, combined with a thorough scrub of company rosters, identifies at least twenty-one soldiers who served with Company I in both the Hürtgen and the Bulge, likely representing most of the veteran core.<sup>58</sup>

The composition and characteristics of this nucleus of twenty-one plus soldiers provides unique insights. The policy of promoting from within the company helped to improve unit cohesion and competence, as soldiers who survived and learned valuable lessons jumped to positions of greater influence where they could share their knowledge. Of the nine staff sergeants (squad leaders) and the two technical sergeants (platoon sergeants) listed on a July 1945 ship roster for the company's stateside trip, five appeared on December 1943 rosters or in November 1944 battlefield accounts, at ranks two to three grades lower. The two company officers remaining after the Hürtgen, the commander and executive officer, both started as platoon leaders. Rush agrees that filling the slots of leaders from within probably protected some soldiers from being casualties and increased the veteran core. Many of the sixteen other soldiers identified in the core group occupied key leader or support positions. The list included the commander,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 41, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Company I, 109th Infantry Regiment Officer Roster, December 1943, Box 4417, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Company I, 109th Infantry Regiment, Ship Roster, July 1945, Box 4417, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Pena, 69. Although this number probably does not account for all of the company veterans, it likely represents a high percentage, as Pena himself revealed he barely could muster a platoon's strength from the entire company on November 10, 1944.

executive officer, first sergeant, mess sergeant, supply sergeant, communications sergeant, medic, mortar section sergeant, two platoon sergeants, and a few squad leaders. The command and control, communications, and support elements of the company retained critical functionality, and enough of the subordinate leaders remained through whom they could coordinate the actions of the degraded platoons. Essentially, the company collapsed in on itself and functioned as a super platoon until replacements allowed it to expand again during reconstitution. Another company commander recalls the same dynamic in the Ardennes, when units held onto their organizational identities and fought as small scale models. Pena himself struggled with not dealing directly with the platoon sergeants after the arrival of two new company officers during reconstitution.<sup>59</sup> Further, the core contained a significant proportion of high-performing soldiers. Pena describes some of them as being “consistently good at playing the game of war,” and he mentions five members of the veteran core by name; Captain Paul, Corporal Smith, Private Clark, Sergeant Stumer and Sergeant Collins.<sup>60</sup> At least four different Company I veterans displayed personal courage in attacks upon superior German forces. One soldier, Sergeant Collins, received the Silver Star for his actions.<sup>61</sup>

Through shared experiences, Company I’s veteran core soon formed its own identity. Surviving members of the veteran core fought to stay with the company. Several soldiers returned to the unit after recovering from wounds or sickness, including the commander on two different occasions. Some even infiltrated forward through enemy lines to reunite with their company in the Bulge.<sup>62</sup> Clark, originally a disciplinary problem, turned down a prestigious Ranger Battalion

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<sup>59</sup> Company I, 109th Infantry Regiment Officer Roster, December 1943; Company I, 109th Infantry Regiment, Ship Roster, July 1945; Rush, 324; Kemp, 291; Pena, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Pena, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Pena, 67, 113; Kemp, 100, 223-224.

<sup>62</sup> Pena, 60, 112, 144.

slot because in his own words, “The guys in my section, in this company, accepted me and became my friends. I can’t leave them now.”<sup>63</sup> Pena himself elevated the surviving members, recalling at a battalion dinner in early December, “I was sober enough to resent the boasting of one of our drunken new company officers. He had not yet been involved in fighting action, and yet he identified himself with the past “glory” of the company. Pop (the First Sergeant) should be at this table, not him.”<sup>64</sup> Pena’s recollections of Company I through the Hürtgen and Ardennes never hint that the company lost its identity, and barely mention the rebuilding of the unit in the four weeks afterward. It seemed as if he recognized that the veteran core was the company. They retained the general outline and spirit of the unit, with a powerful narrative of resilience, teamwork, and survival, around which the replacements galvanized.

Other companies exhibited similar battle-tested foundations. Rush showed that Company A of the 22nd Inf. Reg. maintained a similar core of veterans after a comparable experience in the Hürtgen. Kemp mentions Company B of the 109th Inf. Reg. retaining strength of thirty-seven soldiers, including two company officers after the Hürtgen. Even Company K of the 112th Inf. Reg., which spearheaded the disastrous attack on Schmidt, left the Hürtgen with thirty-one enlisted and two officer survivors. The unit history of Company D, 110th Inf. Reg., in the Bulge mentions three officers, a platoon sergeant, and the high-performing veteran, Private First Class John Wiercinski, who all fought in the Hürtgen.<sup>65</sup> The pattern of the veteran core at the company level repeated across all the divisional infantry regiments.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>65</sup> Rush, 42-43; Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 63, 89; William Paterson, Company D, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit History, January 1945, Manuscript Group 356, Daniel Strickler Manuscript Group 356, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

To paraphrase the 22nd Inf. Reg. assignment sergeant, as long as there remained cohesive and effective structure within headquarters and supporting elements, and at least a core of veterans around which the infantry could be rebuilt, an American infantry division could fight on. Although V Corps had to remove the 28th Inf. Div. from the line after the Hürtgen, the Division itself recovered quickly. It had simply experienced too many casualties in too short of a period to maintain cohesion within its infantry platoons, companies, and in some cases its battalions. However, the Division retained resilient structure in the experienced, cohesive headquarters elements at battalion and above, and almost complete enabler support. This set the stage for successful reconstitution efforts in the four weeks following the Battle of the Hürtgen, as commanders and staffs rebuilt infantry formations around core groups of veterans at the company level.

### **Team Building Efforts**

On January 1, 1945, following the battles of the Hürtgen Forest and the Bulge, Cota wrote to a friend claiming, “If we do not make the same mistakes twice we ought to be the world’s best before very long.”<sup>66</sup> The Iron Division was learning and adapting, aided in part by its resilient structure at multiple levels and the Army’s strong replacement system. However, in mid-November 1944, its performance in the Hürtgen hinted at major issues.<sup>67</sup> Teams at multiple levels did not function well. Combined arms teams failed to integrate their fires to achieve the best effect. Commanders and staff were often unaware of the situation of their units. Squads, even when fully manned and equipped, often did not operate as cohesive teams.

The rest period in the Ardennes presented an opportunity to figure out what went wrong and address some of these fundamental issues of teamwork and cohesion. Facing this task, how

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<sup>66</sup> Norman D. Cota. to Colonel Hillsinger, January 1, 1945, Norman D. Cota Papers, 1912-1961, Series III General Records, Box 2, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 91.

was the Division able to focus its team building efforts during those critical four weeks to make the Division a more effective unit? Some might argue that the Division's performance did not improve in the Ardennes, or that the terrain and the defensive mission gave it an advantage. However, the evidence suggests that the Iron Division did learn from its experiences and focused its reconstitution efforts to become a more effective fighting force. In fact, several units in the Division ultimately earned the Distinguished Unit Citation for their delaying actions.<sup>68</sup> In the reconstitution period, the Iron Division restored the diminished teamwork at all levels by strengthening the effectiveness of leadership, conducting progressive training, and tying into a holistic approach to raising morale.

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest revealed leadership issues. Events like the disastrous rout of the 110th at Vossenack, and the ill-advised commitments of Task Forces Ripple and Davis to retake Schmidt, proved the Division was planning poorly, with inaccurate information. For example, the 112th staff reported the fighting effectiveness of the regiment as excellent, despite the obliteration of nearly the entire 3rd Battalion. The Division operations section in turn submitted false reports to Cota and the VIII Corps regarding the condition of its subordinate units, which encouraged Cota to order impossible tasks. In addition, communication between commanders broke down at times. Peterson, the commander of the 112th Inf. Reg., fell wounded on his way to the division command post for a meeting Cota never called. Also, the discipline of the front-line troops came under scrutiny, as some claimed the 3rd Battalion of the 112th neglected establishing their defense of Schmidt, and that soldiers of the 110th Inf. Reg. broke

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<sup>68</sup> Department of the Army, "Lineage and Honors, 112th Infantry Regiment, 109th Infantry Regiment, 109th Field Artillery Regiment," accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/lineages/branches/inf/0112in.htm/109in.htm/0109fa.htm>.

under an imaginary German ground attack.<sup>69</sup> Realizing not all was right, those in charge focused on improving their leadership teams and restoring discipline by bringing in outside talent, promoting from within, or backfilling with handpicked replacements.

At the division headquarters, Cota felt let down by certain members of his team and made changes to tighten up his staff. Hodges and Gerow expressed displeasure specifically with his operations section due to the poor situational understanding discussed above and Cota himself barely held on to his position. He promptly replaced both his chief of staff, Colonel Charles Valentine, and his operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Briggs, shortly after the Hürtgen, and staff cohesion improved thereafter. The new Chief of Staff, Colonel Joseph L. Gibney, bonded with Cota over their common United States Military Academy background. Briggs' replacement was a long-time Pennsylvania National Guardsman, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Trapani, who started with the 109th Inf. Reg. as a Second Lieutenant in 1941 and had gained extensive experience at the lower levels.<sup>70</sup>

Cota also received two excellent regimental commanders who had profound impacts on restoring teamwork and cohesion within their formations. He recruited Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder, with whom he had worked, and who led the 2nd Ranger Battalion over *Pointe du Hoc* on D-Day, to command the 109th Inf. Reg. in early December. Rudder surprised his soldiers, who were accustomed to a more "CP bound" commander, by appearing at the front shortly after his arrival. After he led a patrol across the Our River into enemy territory, one soldier remarked, "we

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<sup>69</sup> Bradbeer, 31; Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 70, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 99-100, 203; Robert L. Conway, Technical Intelligence Report, Army Service Forces, August 7, 1945, World War 2 Operational Documents, Combined Arms Research Library, 4-5, accessed December 20, 2014, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/2901>.

<sup>70</sup> Bradbeer, 30, 34; Robert Miller, *Division Commander: A Biography of Major General Norman D. Cota* (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Company, 1989), 131; 109th Infantry Regiment Officer Rosters, February 1941-December 1943.



thought he was nuts and would go anywhere for him.” Rudder knew how to fight with combined arms, which would prove invaluable in the Bulge. Soldiers called him “strict but fair,” “professional,” and “the sparkplug that ignited the unit.” He had an immediate impact on soldier discipline, training, and morale.<sup>71</sup>

Colonel Hurly Fuller assumed command of the 110th Inf. Reg. on November 24 after German Artillery wounded his predecessor. Lieutenant General Troy Middleton, a friend of Fuller’s, likely placed him in command. Hurly, a World War 1 veteran who had earned a battlefield commission, proved a valuable leader. Just to be sure, Cota placed the dependable Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Strickler as his Executive Officer. Captured in the Bulge, Fuller was the last to leave the command post, after bandaging several wounded soldiers, even as German tanks and infantry overran it. Captured by the Germans, he assumed command of his group of nearly 200 Allied prisoners, including many of higher rank, and led the defense of the town they occupied after their guards fled.<sup>72</sup>

Each lower level mirrored this practice of progressively improving their leadership teams in the four weeks following the Hürtgen. Commanders moved soldiers up or laterally between units at every level to fill gaps and improve their team. Although impossible to fully track, these moves permeate every report. For example, in the second half of November, the headquarters element of 110th Inf. Reg. plucked two lieutenant colonels and a major from lower level units. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 110th swapped intelligence, operations, and executive officers

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas M. Hatfield, *Rudder: From Leader to Legend* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2011), 219, 221, 222, 224; Kemp, 288.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Chattaway, *Gentlemen from Hell: The History of the 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Division* (Monogahela, PA: Unknown, 1979), 34; Eisenhower, 204; Lonestar Military Vehicle Preservation Association, “COL. Hurley E. Fuller,” June 6, 2001, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.lonestar-mvpa.org/presentations/fuller/fuller.htm>; Miller, *Division Commander*, 131; Office of Medical History, “Hurley E. Fuller to Commanding General, 28th Infantry Division,” February 22, 1945, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwii/bulge/110thInfRegt/Fullerltr.htm>.

to move veteran officers to positions of increasing responsibility. Even down at the company level and below, leaders solidified their teams. Captain Tom Flynn, acting commander of Company K, 110th Inf. Reg., handpicked his squad leaders following the fight. Private Clifford Trombley, a replacement in F Company 110th Inf. Reg. in August and squad leader by the Siegfried Line, picked a large soldier to be his ammo carrier based on his personal experiences.<sup>73</sup> Rush said the same thing happened in the 22nd Inf. Reg., as twenty-three officers and eleven noncommissioned officers changed companies. Movement between units was fluid and common.

Another practice, of internal promotions like Trombley's, inundates all of the reports and histories of the 28th Inf. Div.'s actions. Strickler joined the 28th Inf. Div. as a Major and at the conclusion commanded the 110th Inf. Reg. as a colonel. Harry Kemp joined the 109th Inf. Reg. as a private prior to the war and was a battalion executive officer by the end. George Rumbaugh was a second lieutenant when the war began and commanded the 3rd Battalion 110th as a lieutenant colonel by the end of the war. Clarence Blakeslee who joined an Infantry Company in the 110th as a replacement, served as first sergeant by war's end. Dozens more examples like this emerge from the Second World War records of the Division. Units also promoted and cross-leveled en masse to fill vacancies. In late November, the headquarters of the 1st Battalion 110th Inf. Reg. promoted fifteen soldiers, the 2nd Battalion cross-leveled twenty soldiers. Leaders

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<sup>73</sup> Headquarters, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November 1944; Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November-December 1944, Boxes 397 and 684, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Rush, 295; 1st Lt. Thomas J. Flynn Interview transcript, K Company, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, May 1-2, 1945, Record Group #407, National Archives, accessed February 20, 2015, [http://www.unforgettableveteran.com/Jan\\_28\\_1945\\_Story\\_28th.pdf](http://www.unforgettableveteran.com/Jan_28_1945_Story_28th.pdf); Clifford Trombley, "Clifford Trombley-F Co.," in *Voices from the Foxholes*, ed. Dorothy Chernitsky (Connelsville, PA: Connelsville Printing, 1991), 84.

promoted soldiers internally, stacked their teams with talent, and leavened experience throughout their organization, at every level.<sup>74</sup>

Leaders also improved teamwork by reestablishing discipline. The 1944 Field Manual 100-5 *Operations* stated, “Discipline is the main cohesive force that binds the members of a unit.”<sup>75</sup> Sources argue that some division soldiers displayed poor supply discipline during the relief from the Hürtgen. On November 22, the unit supply representatives from the Division and the regiments met to discuss how to improve equipment discipline. They initiated scheduled and spot inspections on ordnance, motor vehicles, and water points among other things. Vehicle inspection teams from the 728th Ordnance Battalion inspected and impounded failed vehicles. Cota attended a logistics meeting on December 14 to stress first and second echelon maintenance. Regimental, battalion, and company level correspondence all reflected the implementation of this inspection and maintenance regimen.<sup>76</sup> First Sergeant George Mortimer of the Artillery Company of the 112th Inf. Reg. grumbled, “Orders came out that no vehicle would leave its company area unless it was clean, and all there is here is mud.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Headquarters 110th Infantry Regiment, Officers Rosters, February 1941; Headquarters 109th Infantry Regiment, Officers Rosters, February 1941, Box 4417, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO; Blakeslee, 65; Headquarters 2nd Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Morning Reports, November-December 1944, Boxes 397 and 684, National Personnel Records Center, Saint Louis, MO.

<sup>75</sup> War Department, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 80; MacDonald, *The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest*, 99-100; William P. Simmons, Jr., Division Quartermaster, Notes of Meeting Held in G4 Office, November 22, 1944; 28 ID G4 Journal, November-December 1944, Entry 427, Record Group 407, National Archives, College Park, MD. Office of Medical History, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, “Unit Report No. 6, 1 December 1944 to 31 December 1944,” accessed December 15, 2015, <http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwii/bulge/109thInfRegt/109thInfRegtAARDec44.htm>; 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; Pena, 95.

<sup>77</sup> Mortimer, Company History of Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment.

Some claim the loss of Schmidt revealed indiscipline in establishing the defense. In the Ardennes, leaders improved upon the defenses left them by the 8th Division. The 2nd Battalion 112th Inf. Reg. dramatically improved their positions. Flynn from Company K spent significant time working with his soldiers to strengthen the defenses left them by soldiers of the 8th Division in Hosingen. The 110th Inf. Reg. reported consolidating in company strong points from many isolated platoon points inherited by their predecessors. Cannon Company of the 110th prepared extensive local defenses for close-in combat, even though they thought it unlikely. Members of the 707th Tank Battalion recall setting up new fighting positions.<sup>78</sup>

Leaders increased communications discipline as well. In the thick woods of the Hürtgen, communications had presented a difficult challenge, especially via wireless. Flynn describes in detail how Company K built a robust, redundant system of communications from his company command post that reached adjacent, supporting, higher, and lower units. The 110th Inf. Reg. reports building five observation points forward of each battalion and connecting them via redundant wireless and wired communications. Rudder ordered telephone wire laid from his headquarters to each of his companies to augment preexisting telephone connections to the battalions, as he had learned at *Pointe du Hoc* not to rely on radios alone.<sup>79</sup>

The Division further augmented the efforts at improving discipline and leadership teams with the conduct of progressive training. The experiences of the Hürtgen hinted at deficiencies in

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<sup>78</sup> Conway, Technical Intelligence Report, 4-5; 2nd BN 112th Unit History Report, November and December 1944; 1st Lt. Thomas J. Flynn Interview transcript, K Company, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, May 1-2, 1945, 2; 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, November 30, 1944; Irving D. Warden, "The Operations of Cannon Company, 110th Infantry (28th Infantry Division) in the Defense of Munchausen, Luxembourg, in the Battle of the Bulge, 16-19 December 1944 (Personal Experience of A Company Commander)" (Monograph, Advanced Infantry Officers Course, Fort Benning, GA, 1949), 6, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://www.benning.army.mil/library/content/Virtual/Donovanpapers/wwii/>; 707th Tank Battalion, After Action Report, 129-145,.

<sup>79</sup> 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, November 30, 1944; Hatfield, 222.

previous training. Cota blamed a lack of integrated squad training. Pena of Company I complained that his squads received no training in how to fight in dense forest. Combined arms operations in the forest revealed training shortfalls. Commanders frequently did not coordinate well with supporting units. The few tanks and tank destroyers that could get forward to the regiments often moved uncovered by the infantry. Units coordinated artillery and close air support poorly, reporting long delays in requested fires, rounds falling short, and allied planes bombing friendly-held positions. Front-line battalions ran short of trained forward observers. Cannon Company of the 112th Inf. Reg. maintained only one of three teams forward with a battalion for most of the fight in the Hürtgen.<sup>80</sup> These deficiencies drove the Division's training focus for the reconstitution period. Despite a lack of written guidance, evidence points to a discernible, decentralized approach; following a crawl, walk, run progression from individual skill level training to company level combined arms operations. The subordinate units tailored and augmented this training approach depending on their situation. In the four weeks before the Bulge, most of the Division focused on individual and squad level training, improving combined arms integration, and finally pulling it all together in platoon and company sized raids.

Training during the reconstitution period progressed from individual to small group, likely driven by Cota, given his belief in building the squad first. Captain Flynn of Company K 112th, located at Hosingen, recalled pointed directives from the Regiment and Division that ordered units to train replacement troops on how to conduct basic tasks like scouting, patrolling, and observation. Each soldier had a prescribed number of hours to complete this basic work. Individual training led to squad level training. Flynn remembered his unit sending patrols of six to seven soldiers, led by an officer, along predetermined battalion routes. Company K would rotate

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<sup>80</sup> Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*, 47, 75, 80, 89, 91; Norman Cota to Ivan Peterman, Letter, 2; Pena, 209; Mortimer, *Company History of Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment*, November 5.

different squads through and slowly lengthened the route. Captain James T. Haslam, Battalion Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion 109th Inf. Reg, said that initially personnel were reequipped and given every opportunity for refresher training, and later training intensified, with particular emphasis on the teamwork and control of small units.<sup>81</sup> The enabling units went through a similar regimen. The 707th Tank Battalion S3 Journal reports that by November 21 their tank companies were training replacements and carrying out training schedules. From December 1 to 15, they moved to tank crew drills and flamethrower training for bow gunners and tank commanders. The commander of Cannon Company of the 112th trained replacement officers, while the first sergeant cross-trained section sergeants as artillery observers. By December 2, they were firing in support of pillbox raids. Another company rotated guns daily to the front to fire at German positions for training.<sup>82</sup>

The units also sought to better integrate supporting elements into the defense and train for combined arms operations. Most of the combined arms training occurred within the reserve formations. The 110th Inf. Reg. rotated one battalion through a “training status” as the Division reserve, and the 109th Inf. Reg. maintained a reserve battalion, which it placed in a training status as well. The 112th Inf. Reg. could not free up a reserve battalion but did train lower level reserve formations. The 707th Tank Battalion reported that in the period of December 1 to 15, divisional artillery trained their forward observers. The 110th attached one platoon of Company B, 707th

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<sup>81</sup> Norman D. Cota to Lieutenant General Ben Lear, Deputy Commander European Theater of Operations, February 25, 1945, Norman D. Cota Papers, 1912-1961, Series III General Records, Box 2, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; 1st Lt. Thomas J. Flynn Interview transcript, K Company, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, May 1-2, 1945, 4-6; James T. Haslam, “The Operations Of The 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry (28th Infantry Division) In The Battle of the Bulge, Vicinity of Diekirch, Luxembourg, 16-23 December, 1944 (Personal Experience Of A Battalion Executive Officer)” (Monograph, Fort Benning, GA: Advanced Infantry Officers Course, 1949), 6, 8.

<sup>82</sup> 707th Tank Battalion, After Action Report, 150-153; Mortimer, Company History of Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment, November 30; Walden, 3.

Tank Battalion to its second battalion in order to train both the armor and infantry soldiers in combined arms tactics. The regiments also created combined arms strong points of infantry companies supported by artillery, tanks, and anti-tank personnel, which later slowed the German forces in the Ardennes Offensive. Company F of the 112th Inf. Reg. recalls rotating platoons through assault training at a regimental training school. Rudder organized training with division artillery officers for his infantry officers. He wanted to make every infantryman an effective forward observer for artillery. During the Bulge, a platoon leader of the 109th Inf. Reg. utilized these skills to call down devastating fire on two unfortunate German Infantry Battalions in the open. Kemp cites the importance of this training as critical to the success of the 109th in holding the southern shoulder of the German offensive.<sup>83</sup>

Additionally, leaders sought to instill confidence in teamwork above squad-level. The 1941 Field Manual 21-5 *Military Training* stated, “In order to accomplish its purpose efficiently, military training will be conducted by the use of decentralization, balanced progressive training, and applicatory tactical exercises.”<sup>84</sup> The regiments of the 28th Inf. Div. followed this model, incorporating enemy formations to their front. In the last weeks prior to the offensive, the infantry regiments conducted several platoon and company level raids. Cannon Company of the 112th fired in support of a December 2 pillbox attack likely carried out by Wine and the assault

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<sup>83</sup> 28th Infantry Division, G3 Periodic Report, November 24, 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 853, Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS; 707th Tank Battalion, After Action Report, December 1944, 153; 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, November 30, 1944; Hurley E. Fuller, “Report of Operations of the 110th Infantry Combat Team, December 16-18, 1944,” Daniel Strickler Collection, Series #356m.16, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA; Company F, 112th Infantry Regiments Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; Hatfield 222; Embert T. Fossum, “The Operations of ‘Task Force L’, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry (28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division) Near Grosbous, Luxembourg, 20-23 December, 1944 (Ardennes-Alsace Campaign): (Personal Experience of Task Force Commander)” (Monograph, Fort Benning, GA: Advanced Infantry Officers Course, 1948), 33; Kemp, 289.

<sup>84</sup> War Department, Field Manual (FM) 21-5, *Military Training* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941) 2.

detachment of Company F. Company E of the 110th Inf. Reg. conducted a raid to secure prisoners, with Company H in support. The 3rd Battalion of the 110th sent a patrol of two platoons on December 6 to conduct reconnaissance and secure terrain, while the Regiment was developing plans on December 12 for a battalion level training problem.<sup>85</sup> These operations in early December served as the culminating training events for many units, only days prior to the Battle of the Bulge. The evidence suggests that in a few short weeks, between arriving in the Ardennes broken and the beginning of the German offensive, many of the subordinate units of the Division managed to carry out an almost complete, decentralized training cycle. They progressed from individual to company, and headed towards battalion level, while improving combined arms integration and cohesion at multiple levels.

Although leadership improvements and focused training helped, morale remained a complex problem, perhaps the most critical one for the Iron Division. Napoleon once said, “In war the moral is to the physical as three is to one.”<sup>86</sup> Improving morale was paramount to cementing the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the Division at all levels, but required a holistic approach. The problem of morale took two forms. Replacements, who comprised the bulk of the reconstituted infantry companies after the Hürtgen, suffered from the rigors of the individual replacement pipeline, while all soldiers yearned for even a brief sense of normalcy during continuous front-line service. By late 1944, the Army has taken significant steps to address the

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<sup>85</sup> Mortimer, Company History of Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment, December 2, 1944; 3d Battalion 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; 110th Infantry Regiment, Unit Report No. 5, December 31, 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1320, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>86</sup> Suzy Platt, ed., *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1989), accessed February 21, 2015, [www.bartleby.com/73/](http://www.bartleby.com/73/).



demoralizing aspects of the replacement system, but providing any sense of normalcy near the front required a broader national effort and the right conditions.

A few years into the war, the Army realized its individual replacement system was destroying morale. One post-war Army study stated, “The experience of replacements en route was such as to destroy their morale and undo the effects of their training.”<sup>87</sup> Often separated from friends, they spent many long weeks in rough transit or sitting in replacement depots in substandard conditions. When they reached the front, units often pushed them straight into battle. Once the Army recognized the problem, all echelons worked to improve the system. In October 1943, the Army Ground Forces assumed from the Service Forces the responsibility for the movement of combat replacements, and began steadily improving conditions. For example, the AGF established two new shipping depots stateside, and deliberately began trying to keep two to four man buddy teams together. Private Slovik and his traveling companion Private John Tankey stayed together the whole way through the system, even joining the same infantry company. Further, the AGF developed a massive orientation effort in 1944 to address replacements’ fear of the unknown. It familiarized them with the true scope of the dangers they faced, why they were risking their lives, and reduced the myth of German soldier and weapon superiority. One inspecting officer called the program excellent by August of 1944.<sup>88</sup> Also, units paid more attention to replacements later in the war as they moved closer to the front. In August 1944, the 28th Inf. Div. established a “casual company” to receive replacements and soldiers returning to duty. Its soldiers usually provided a basic orientation to replacements, inventoried equipment, made up shortages, and then delivered them to the regiments, although the experience varied with conditions at the front. It did not perform training. In the Hürtgen Forest, the 28 Inf. Div. did

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<sup>87</sup> Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacement*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> The General Board, US Forces European Theater, 30; Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacement*, 10-11; Holt, 29, 76, 92, 96.

away with even the most basic of reception and integration operations. By November of 1944, when the 28 Inf. Div. was leaving the Hürtgen, the Army's efforts at improving the morale of the individual replacements had reached their high water mark, but those alone did not overcome the deficiencies of the system.<sup>89</sup>

To make matters worse, the replacements to the 28th Inf. Div. were joining a unit that had just been demoralized in brutal combat. The Surgeon General of the Army summarized how the continuous engagement of divisions, constantly refilled with new replacements during the fighting, had "created a vicious cycle with respect to battle fatigue which no system of individual relief can overcome." However, an emerging partnership between the military and civilian sectors in the United States sought to provide a holistic and effective response to the issues of morale, given enough time and space to act. James J. Cooke, in his book *American Military Experience: American Girls, Beer, and Glenn Miller: GI Morale in World War II*, argues that an ensemble of the Special Services Division, the American Exchange Services, and the United Services Organizations (USO) followed soldiers into combat to provide critical morale improvement resources.<sup>90</sup> In late November 1944, this system found enough time and space in Luxembourg to provide its ensemble of services to the weary soldiers of the Division, augmented by unit efforts, ultimately raising soldier morale and team cohesion prior to the Battle of the Bulge.

After the First World War, the War Department commissioned a study of the efforts to improve soldier morale during that conflict. The so-called *Fosdick Report*, named after its author and published in 1918, suggested that building and maintaining soldier morale should not be the job of the Army alone, but should involve the unified efforts of relief agencies like the Red Cross,

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<sup>89</sup> Greenwald, 59; Huie, 158-162; The General Board, US Forces European Theater, 33; Holt, 98, 128, 139.

<sup>90</sup> Keast, *Provision of Enlisted Replacement*, 33; James J. Cooke, *American Girls, Beer, and Glenn Miller: GI Morale in World War II*, (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 4.

YMCA, Salvation Army, and Knights of Columbus, among others. As war clouds gathered over the United States in 1939, Marshall called upon an academic involved in building the selective service, Frederick Henry Osborn, to resurrect the ideals of the *Fosdick Report* and lead the Morale Branch, the forerunner to the Special Services Division. Simultaneously, Marshall tapped Joseph W. Byron, a First World War veteran, successful businessperson, and member of the War Production Board, to head the American Exchange Services, and bring personal hygiene and convenience products to soldiers in garrison and the field. In 1941, as Special Services settled into a more narrowly defined recreational role, President Roosevelt announced the formation of the USO, to do much of what Fosdick originally set out to do, and bring together a host of civilian organizations in their efforts to support the war effort. Cooke states, “The USO mission was simple, to provide ‘a home away from home’ for soldiers in a wholesome environment off post.” Designed well from the start, the ensemble of the Special Services Division, American Exchange Services, and the USO expanded with the war effort through 1943 and 1944 to wherever GI’s served. By 1944, Special Services Division had created forty company-sized elements trained and equipped to provide recreational and informational services to troops serving in theaters of war.<sup>91</sup> The soldiers of the Special Services Division integrated the efforts of these three organizations to support units within their assigned areas.

Limited records obscure the exact command relationship of the 28th Inf. Div. and the Special Service companies during the reconstitution period in the Ardennes, but multiple accounts reveal them at work. Cooke places the 2nd and 13th Special Services Companies in the Ardennes before the Battle of the Bulge. These companies moved a few weeks behind the front-line troops, and therefore had not been able to provide too many services before the Allies pushed the Germans out of France. Conditions in the Hürtgen had also not been conducive to them

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<sup>91</sup> Cooke, 21, 26, 27, 28, 39, 73; War Department, Field Manual (FM) 28-105, *The Special Services Company*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1944), 1.

providing services there either. Thus, the 28th had gone a few months without much in the way of morale-building activities prior to moving into the Ardennes. The rest period provided sufficient facilities and security for the Special Services soldiers to do their work. They integrated their efforts with those of the American Exchange Services and the USO primarily in four areas: athletics; entertainment; information and education; and canteen and field exchange.<sup>92</sup> Multiple accounts of 28th soldiers from this period cite services in these areas, minus the athletics due to the poor weather.

A Special Services section attached to the Iron Division was in charge of coordinating these recreational and informational services for the Division and its subordinate units. After the Division established its headquarters, this section set up in a movie theater about a block away from the command post. One member of the section expressed excitement about the opportunity to help the Iron Division soldiers “without the usual battlefield handicaps.” He mentioned a Red Cross mobile already in town and making plans for its rounds to the different units of the Division. His team had built up a large stockpile of letter writing material, and plans were already underway for a division rest center and passes to Paris and Brussels. As Captain Robert H. Henschen put it, the Special Services section “was really getting ready to present the men of the Division with some diversion during their rest period.” Soon thereafter, the section began showing movies two to three nights a week in the theater in Wiltz.<sup>93</sup>

Subordinate units benefited from the services of the Special Supply Division as well. The leader of the section, Major Montado, traveled with his staff to the 109th Inf. Reg. Area to help regimental officers establish a rest area in Diekerch. It too had a movie theater, billets for the

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<sup>92</sup> Cooke, 142, 151-152; War Department, FM 28-105, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Robert H. Henschen Papers, Recollections of the Battle of the Bulge, Individual Collections, Series #272.99, Manuscript Group 272, Pennsylvania Military Museum Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, 5, 11.

men, a canteen, and a large supply of correspondence and reading material.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately the 110th and 112th were not able to set up equivalent sites due to manpower constraints, although 2nd Battalion of the 112th Inf. Reg. did report “entertainment in the form of frequent movies, USO shows, beer provided, PX rations of candy and other supplies” in Leiler, ten miles north of the division headquarters.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, the Division established its own rest center at Clearveaux behind these two regiments in the north, with a capacity of around 200 soldiers. The Division picked Major Reynolds of the 110th Inf. Reg. to run it. The center included “two nice hotels with soft beds, sheets, hot baths, PX, a movie theater, and a real American girl operating a do-nut and coffee dug-out.”<sup>96</sup> The soldiers could attend weekly socials and dances with local girls as guests. The Iron Division wisely took care of its veterans first, apparently directing the companies to choose soldiers for three-day rotations based on length of combat service. Several 112th Inf. Reg. unit reports recall passes to Paris, Clervaux, and Arlon, apparently the location of the VIII corps rest center, along with showers, a Red Cross club, movies, and USO shows. Multiple units mention receiving the first allotment of six thirty day leave passes for the United States. One company’s historical entry for November 26 simply stated “church, beer, more passes.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>95</sup> 2nd Battalion 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>96</sup> Henschen, Recollections of the Battle of the Bulge, 9-10; 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, November and December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

<sup>97</sup> Headquarters Company, 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS; Company F, 112th Infantry Regiment. Unit History Report, December 1944, US Army Unit Records, 1917-1950, Box 1326, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

Multiple supporting elements pitched in to support and raise morale as well. Quartermaster provided clean clothing and a satisfying Thanksgiving dinner for every soldier. Personnel officers stayed busy handling leave, passes, promotions, and awards. Colonel Gustin Nelson, commander of the 112th Inf. Reg., awarded a few soldiers the Bronze Star, and scores of others the Combat and Expert Infantry Badges during this period, the latter two resulting in pay increases. Soldiers took time to reconnect with home. The division postal section forwarded a mountain of mail for the soldiers as the Christmas season set upon them. First Sergeant Anderson of the 2nd Battalion, 112th recorded a news broadcast for the people of Pennsylvania. Several units recall payday in Belgian francs on November 30. The leadership had not forgotten its wounded through this period either. Cota visited the wounded soldiers of his Division at the 102nd Evacuation Hospital in Elllebruck, Luxembourg. In a letter to Colonel Carlton Goodiel of the Medical Section of First Army he recalls the excellent care by the 102nd Evacuation Hospital of the Division's wounded soldiers from November 20 to December 16. Captain Haslam of the 109th Inf. Reg. summarized with words that could describe the whole Division, "The trend of conversation and thought turned toward passes, leaves of absence, occasional parties, mail and a white Christmas."<sup>98</sup>

On December 16, German forces exploded from the Ardennes and shattered this trend of thought within the Iron Division, restorative and festive as it was. However, if what Napoleon says is true, the specific efforts of the Division, the Army, and the Nation to improve the morale of the Iron Division soldiers through the reconstitution period may have had the biggest impact on its preparedness for the Bulge. Historians have documented well the demoralizing aspects of the individual replacement system, which sometimes fed soldiers piecemeal into battles of attrition. Yet, when a pause finally came, and an opportunity presented itself, the ensemble of

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<sup>98</sup> Haslam, 31.

resources provided by the Special Services Division, the American Exchange Services, and the USO, augmented by the work of the units, supporting elements, and other organizations, performed miracles in restoring morale to the soldiers of the 28th Inf. Div.

## **Conclusion**

This monograph set out to explain the re-forging of the 28th Inf. Div. as it reconstituted in the short four weeks between its destructive losses in the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest and its strong delaying action in the Battle of the Bulge. Few historians have provided a holistic analysis of the reconstitution of an infantry division. Many have focused on the technical aspects of reconstitution, such as the number and types of troops and equipment received per day. Others have analyzed the loss of cohesion of the primary groups of soldiers at the lowest levels, like squad and platoon. A systemic viewpoint provided more granularity of how this process played out as strategic decisions and frameworks affected organizations and humans within a particular operational context.

A detailed analysis of the individual replacement system of the US Army in the Second World War suggests a solid system that enabled the 28th Inf. Div. in its reconstitution efforts, despite the preponderance of the writing in the histories on the subject repudiating that idea. In fact, most research says exactly the opposite. Therefore, significant analysis focused on uncovering an understanding of the truth. The individual replacement system was not necessarily a bad idea, as some historians argue. It grew from the US Army's experiences, and what it thought it had learned in the First World War, and was formalized because of the strategic manpower constraints of fighting a global war. Further, the evidence suggests that within these constraints the Army actually learned from its early experiences and adjusted well. While proof certainly exists that quality and training of the replacements suffered for the first few years, by 1944 changes to personnel policies and training had a profound impact on the direction of the

war, as the example of the 28th Inf. Div. in the Ardennes illustrates. Finally, a unit cannot rebuild upon a foundation of poorly trained, unmotivated soldiers; thus, the extensive focus on the quality, training, and morale of the replacement soldiers received by the Division. Before a unit progresses to collective training, soldiers must be individually proficient, motivated, and physically fit, and if they are smart, even better. In addition, the Army has to send the right amount of the right type when units need them. When a unit is nearly full-staffed, with highly trained, physically fit, motivated soldiers, it has a great starting point to move beyond individual training. The individual replacement system provided just such an expeditious starting point for the Iron Division to begin its reconstitution efforts in November of 1944. Soldiers like Pena, Flynn, Blakeslee, and Stumer, among so many others, provide a face to the quality that the individual replacement system delivered to the Iron Division in late 1944.

The second section highlighted the importance of looking at the Iron Division's reconstitution from a systemic perspective. Despite the near destruction of its infantry regiments, the Division retained significant resilient structure. Experienced headquarters continued to function proficiently, supporting elements survived generally intact, and most companies retained small veteran cores. The Iron Division exonerated the importance the Army placed on cohesive and effective staffs in the inter-war period. Analysis revealed that most of the headquarters within the 28th Inf. Div. units, from battalion and above, exhibited proficiency and had served together through shared experiences. Although German forces in the Hürtgen destroyed a few battalion headquarters, generally they survived intact at that level and above. These cohesive, experienced headquarters acted like the nervous system of the Division, connecting with peers, subordinates, and superiors both horizontally and vertically, and connecting soldiers with the Division, the Army, and the Nation. Long-term relationships, some going back to prewar National Guard roots, amplified the interconnectedness. These staffs were able to continue to integrate and coordinate the activities of the specialized and hierarchical components of the Division.



Although the supporting arms also survived generally intact through the battle, infantry units had suffered without tank, tank destroyer, artillery, or close air support at times. In addition, some soldiers went days without food or medical support. These conditions contributed to instances of unit collapse. Experiences like these reinforced the criticality of integrating combined arms and support operations with the infantry. Because they retained personnel and equipment integrity, the supporting units could bypass reconstitution efforts. They were immediately prepared to capture lessons learned in the Hürtgen and train with the rebuilding infantry units.

The Iron Division fought nearly nonstop from its arrival in the European Theater through the Hürtgen. Miraculously, veteran cores survived and held the infantry companies together in combat long beyond thought possible. They also served as the nucleus of the reconstituted companies in the Ardennes. Research revealed that a high proportion of these cores were comprised of leaders and quality soldiers. They developed a protective loyalty to the group, and felt that the company's identity rested with them. The process of promoting from within probably protected this group, and leaders at all levels consciously leavened their experience throughout their formation to strengthen its effectiveness. Even though replacements quickly refilled the ranks, and significant division structure remained intact at multiple levels, the 28th Inf. Div. required large-scale reconstitution of morale and cohesion.

The third section highlights the Division's ability to learn from its experiences and become a more effective fighting force than it had been in the Hürtgen. Leaders at all levels made hard personnel decisions following that battle, replacing many long-time members of the Division or regiments. In most cases, these changes benefited the organization, revealing the centrality of quality leadership in restoring trust and teamwork, both in visible roles, like commanders, and invisible roles, such as staff officers.

In addition, the Division resorted, with insightful vigor, to traditional methods of restoring teamwork. The Division wasted no time in reestablishing discipline within the formations, especially regarding the improvement of defensive positions and communications, and the maintenance of equipment. Soldiers complained about this garrison-like approach but it helped to prepare the Division both physically and mentally for the unexpected German offensive. The 28th also established a decentralized, comprehensive, and progressive training program immediately. The Division apparently provided the guidance and allowed the regiments to execute. They did so with proficiency, moving from individual skills training for replacements, through collective training, to combined arms and company level operations within those four short weeks.

Somehow, the Division was able to balance the increased focus on discipline and training with a comprehensive rest and recovery program. Resting the weary bodies and spirits of the soldiers who had survived the Hürtgen proved to be beyond the capabilities of the Division alone. Thankfully, the Army and the nation had shown great foresight in developing an ensemble of services from the Army's Special Services Division, the American Exchange Services, and the USO, all administered by a Special Services detachment at the Division headquarters. This provided another example of the importance of a holistic approach to solving a difficult problem, and tying in the full resources, moral and physical, of the nation. It took ingenuity and foresight to predict that this level of service would not only be required, but would be possible just behind the front-lines. The pervasiveness of their services throughout the formation provides proof of the effectiveness of this approach. This allowed Iron Division soldiers to feel a much-needed sense of normalcy for a short period, from simple things like reading a book or writing a letter, to social engagements of headquarters to reintroduce camaraderie. Wisely, the Division focused on the veterans first, and many had taken advantage of these services to recover physically and mentally before the next big trial for the Division. One thing the research was unable to quantify, but that

ran beneath the surface of all of the literature, was the importance of a regional tie. The effect of the unit's association with Pennsylvania on the soldiers and population is beyond the scope of this paper, but would be worth researching in the future.

Humans are enthralled with the dramatic, or the exciting. Thus, the story of a unit reconstituting might not hold much appeal, with its drudgery and routine. This may explain why there is so little available information both in the official histories and in soldiers' own memories of this period, sandwiched between two of the largest battles in the history of the US Army. Yet, the story of how the 28th Inf. Div. was able to perform so admirably in the Ardennes after such rough handling in the Hürtgen contains valuable lessons.

First, the conditions for its reconstitution were set long before the Iron Division arrived on the Normandy beach in July of 1944. The decision to rely on a limited number of divisions forced the issue of the quality of the individual replacement, specifically the infantry, to the forefront of the Army and even the nation's consciousness. Here it received the attention it deserved, and Army and nation threw great energy into trying to resolve this crisis, one among many of the time. In addition, the Army learned lessons in the First World War about the importance of soldier morale and combining military and civilian efforts to improve it. These lessons crystallized into a system that combined the physical and moral capabilities of many civilian and military entities, in essence the nation, at the tip of the spear where it proved crucial. We will fight again, and many of the conditions for success or failure may already be set. It is critical that we always look holistically at how our current systems tie back to our broader national moral and physical capabilities. This includes seeing how the Army as an organization is socially cohered to the broader nation. It might be useful to consider how much the geographical association of units, like the Iron Division with Pennsylvania, contributed to social cohesion and support.

Second, much research today focuses on the importance of systemic thinking in the name of organizational progress. The US Army appears to have been thinking systemically before anyone called it that, as reflected in the doctrine of the time and decisions on the ground. Training, organization, and leadership reflected decentralization, or loose coupling, which provided flexibility and strength. Headquarters and leaders at every level were conducting continuous analysis, often before the battle even ended, and adapting form and function to improve future performance. Teams of experienced headquarters elements at battalion and above with significant service together maintained cohesion, laterally, vertically, organizationally, and societally. Despite these and other systemic capabilities, the Division still required space and time to reform, thankfully available for a short four weeks in the Ardennes.

Third, this paper cautions those who might think there is a scientific formula for unit reconstitution or maintaining the cohesion of a unit. There may be parameters that make sense at higher levels in the system that will be dictated to units, as the individual replacement system was to the 28th Inf. Div. in the Second World War, and Army Force Generation in the Global War on Terror. Some argue that if we just set the squads and get them through live fire exercises we can rotate them into the line efficiently. Others downplay the critical need for firm linkages between the Army and the nation. These are overly simplistic approaches to complex systemic issues. More important is a nonstop, continuous planning process for the eventuality of unit reconstitution within the environment of a particular time and place.

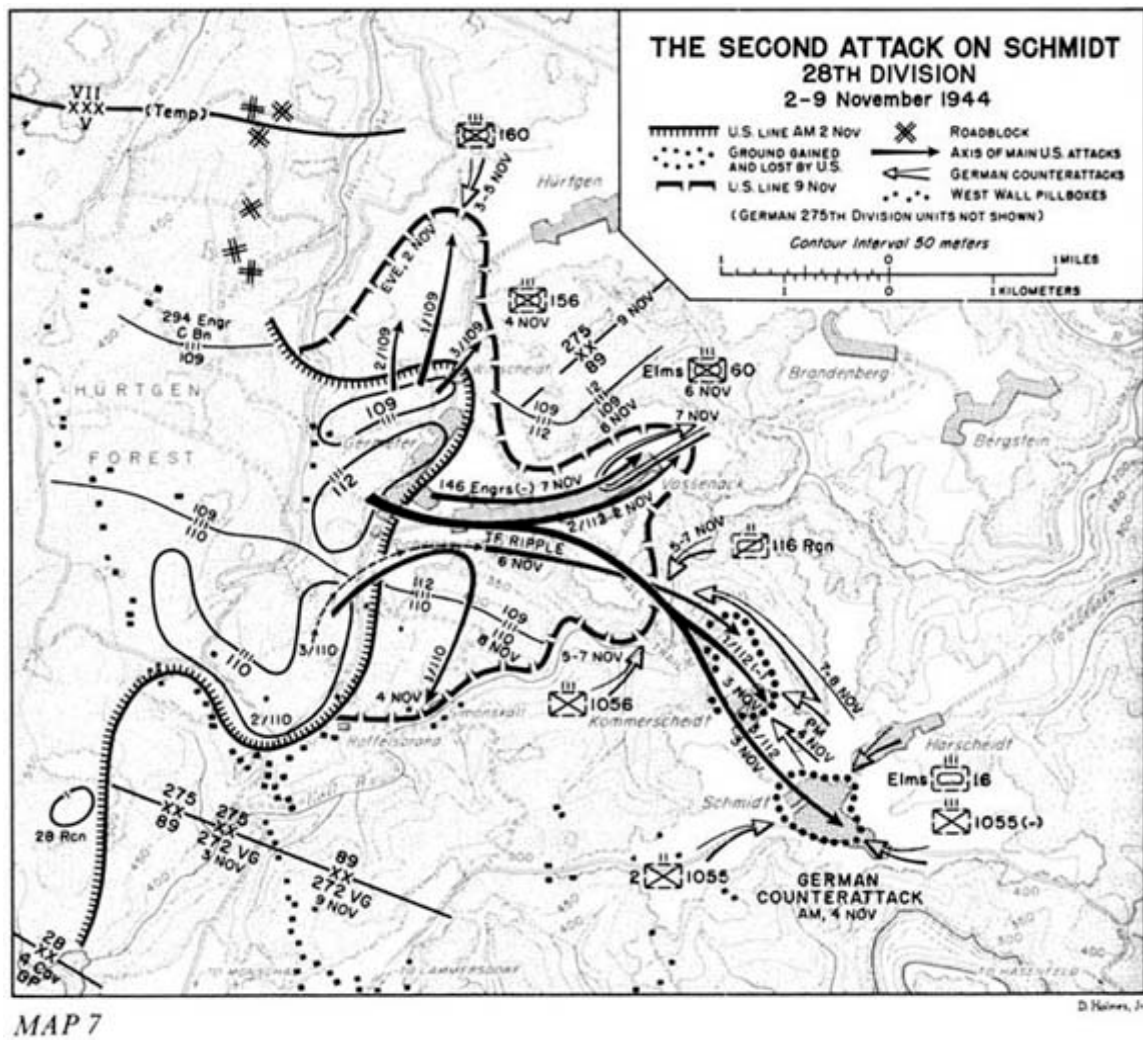
Finally, the Division's reconstitution experience suggests certain continuities in the process. The quality, training, and morale of soldiers will always be critical to units engaged in combat, and the less time and space available to fix them, the more important they are initially. Headquarters do better when they have served together for long periods. Setting the commander-staff team and providing them increased stability benefited the Division. Focus on cohesion should go beyond the primary group to look at the ability to form combined arms teams and

function as a system. In addition, leavening experience throughout an organization improves the effectiveness of its units. Leaders at all levels should be able to make their own personnel decisions and move personnel vertically or horizontally.

In summary, rebuilding the Division between the Hürtgen and the Ardennes was not the result of a pre-formulated plan or a singular effort. Rather, several actions occurred at multiple levels to address this complex problem. Having only limited information, military and civilian leaders either adequately planned for, or reacted effectively to, unforeseen consequences of high-level decisions and tactical realities. This underscores the importance of systemic thinking. Continuous analysis, thinking through multiple order effects, building flexibility into organizations, and taking care of the most complex systems, the individual soldiers and the teams they comprise, all proved critical to the re-forging of the Iron Division.

## Appendix A

### The Attack on Schmidt

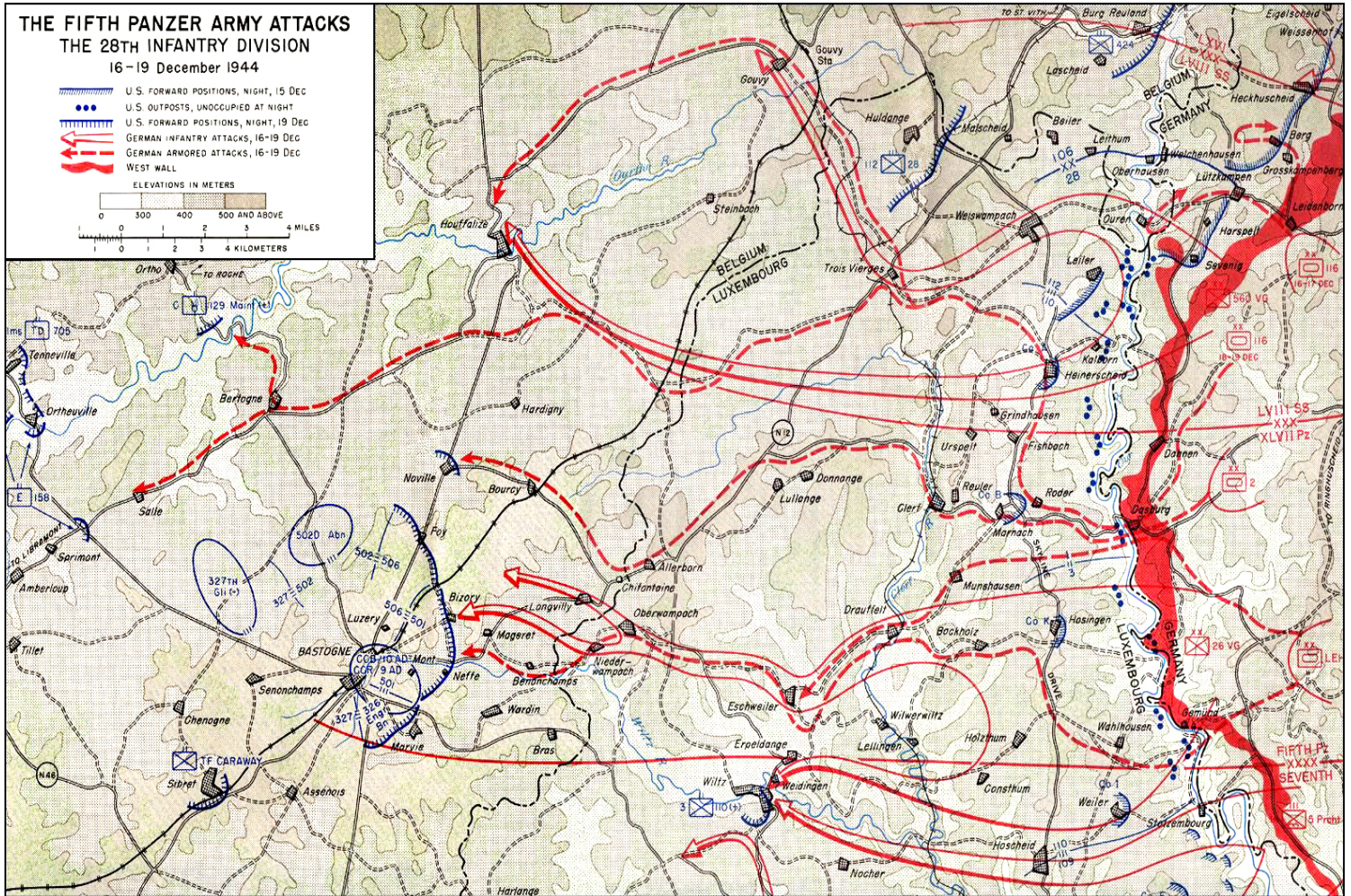


Source: US Army Center of Military History, "Planning the Thrust," 344, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/Siegfried/Siegfried%20Line/siegfried-ch15.htm>.



## Appendix B

### The Early Stages of the Battle of the Bulge



Source: U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed February 10, 2015,  
<http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/7-8/notes/MapIV.jpg>.

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